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CENTER FOR NATIVE AMERICAN YOUTH CHAIRMAN BYRON DORGAN TESTIFIES BEFORE SENATE COMMITTEE

*SENATOR DORGAN WILL TESTIFY FOR THE US SENATE COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS IN
SUPPORT OF A BILL, INTRODUCED BY SENATORS HEITKAMP AND MURKOWSKI, TO ESTABLISH A
COMMISSION ON NATIVE CHILDREN.*

Washington, DC, April 2, 2014 ---- US Senator Byron Dorgan (ret.), founder and chairman of the [Center for Native American Youth](#) (CNAY) at the Aspen Institute, will provide testimony about a bill introduced by US Senators Heidi Heitkamp (D-ND) and Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), a board member of CNAY, to address the challenges experienced by Native American children. The hearing is scheduled for 2:30 pm EST on Wednesday, April 2. More details on the hearing are below.

"I am proud of Heidi Heitkamp, and our board member Lisa Murkowski, for writing this legislation," remarked former Senator Dorgan. "The Commission will help develop solutions to address the needs faced by our youngest First Americans who have too often been left behind by our government."

At the legislative hearing, Dorgan will testify in support of S. 1622, a bill that would create the [Alyce Spotted Bear and Walter Soboleff Commission on Native Children](#). Dorgan expressed his early support of the bill in an [op-ed](#) last November. The role of the Commission would be to study and make recommendations on how to improve programs and services for Native children, addressing issues like high rates of poverty, lack of educational opportunities, child abuse, domestic violence, as well as alcohol and substance abuse.

"As the former chairman of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, Senator Dorgan has a unique understanding of the challenges Native children face," said Senator Heidi Heitkamp. "Even though he's no longer in office, his passion and perseverance to face these issues head on has never wavered. I'm honored he is testifying at today's hearing about the importance of my bill to create a Commission on Native Children."

CNAY has been working to increase awareness of Native children and prioritize their needs at all levels of government, private and public funding institutions, and within child advocacy organizations. In CNAY's outreach to over 3,000 Native youth across the country, young people and tribal authorities have identified lack of data and coordination between stakeholders as priority challenges. The proposed Commission would augment the national efforts of many tribal organizations by conducting a comprehensive study of youth-serving programs and services, and then developing a report with recommendations for improvements. This report, developed with diverse expertise and public private partners, would be sent to the President, Congress, and the White House Council on Native American Affairs.

"We are proud that after three years of building the Center for Native American Youth as a policy and resource platform for Native American children, we are being called on to provide comments on this important Commission," said Erin Bailey, director of the Center for Native American Youth.

In his written testimony, Dorgan will highlight the importance of the Commission on Native Children's holistic approach and involvement of many important stakeholders and advocates already making important progress in addressing the needs of Native American children. Partners like the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Casey Family Programs, the N7 Fund, are devoting significant resources to work with tribes and improve the lives of Native American children. The Commission would elevate this work within the federal government as well.

"I believe this legislation is an important step and will help to save lives," said Dorgan.

Legislative Hearing Details:

Date: April 2, 2014

Time: 2:30 PM EST

Location: 628 Senate Dirksen Building

Webcast online: <http://www.indian.senate.gov/hearing/legislative-hearing-receive-testimony-following-bills>

Center for Native American Youth is dedicated to improving the health, safety and overall well-being of Native American youth through communication, policy development and advocacy. Founded by former US Senator Byron Dorgan in February 2011, CNAY is a policy program within the Aspen Institute, headquartered in Washington, DC. The CNAY works to strengthen and create new connections as well as exchange resources and best practices that address the challenges facing Native youth, with a special emphasis on suicide prevention. Visit CNAY's website for a comprehensive list of resources available to young Native Americans, tribes and the general public. For more information, visit www.cnay.org

The Aspen Institute is an educational and policy studies organization based in Washington, DC. Its mission is to foster leadership based on enduring values and to provide a nonpartisan venue for dealing with critical issues. The Institute is based in Washington, DC; Aspen, Colorado; and on the Wye River on Maryland's Eastern Shore. It also has offices in New York City and an international network of partners. For more information, visit www.aspeninstitute.org.